



Call for paper
13th Workshops Young Researchers of AJEI
Nagpur, India, 7-13th February 2010

Social and political movements in South Asia

The Association of Young Indian Studies (AJEI) gathers students in social sciences working on South Asia from MA level to postdoctorate. Each year, it organizes a one-week workshop in India and a one-day seminar in France. These events offer opportunities for young researchers and students to present their work and to have them discussed by experienced scholars. The 2010 edition of the workshops, which will be held in Nagpur in Maharashtra from 7th to 13th February 2010 in collaboration with *Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University* and the *department of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Thought*, will revolve around the question of “*social and political movements in South Asia*”.

In an international context of production wherein social sciences approaches multiply and renew their perspectives on political organizations and social movements, this generic theme covers a great number of research topics of young researchers working on India and/or South Asia. Through the respective communications, the aim of the workshop is to mobilize interdisciplinarity in social sciences in order to integrate the different contributions coming, among others, from history, sociology, anthropology, political sciences and geography.

South Asia knows many particularly complex situations which has led to the emergence and/or (trans)formation of political and social movements with regard to different specific struggles and stakes. Social and political movements thereby, whatever their forms and manifestations may be, participate to the (re)definition of the configurations from where they once emerged: reservation policies and importance of categorial movements (castes and tribes), juridical struggles around the events of interconfessional riots, land conflicts and movements against dispossession, environmental movements, people’s movements for democratization, family recompositions, etc.; these dimensions all equally concerning the proposed theme and constitute possible fields of exploration.

The contributions can position themselves in one or many of the axes outlined below.

Tools and theoretical perspectives to apprehend universes of social struggles

This first axis interrogates the possibility, both critical and cumulative, to work with a certain number of tools of knowledge and theories with regard to the analysis of social and political movements beyond the restricted context of South Asia. Under what conditions can the categories mobilized in South Asia be considered operational in the analysis of the region sociohistorical contexts? Likewise, can the categories crafted and used in Europe help to understand the events specific to this region? What are the dominant analytical paradigms considered to be particularly heuristic in the study of these social phenomena which, in South Asia, evolve rapidly even as they witness strong regularities? What kind of (epistemological) tension is the researcher confronted with when studying social and political movements: for instance when he or she takes sides and even takes up the cause of the people studied?

Defining social and political movements

What constitutes a social or political movement? It appears necessary to raise different questions relative to the definition of events normally categorized as social and/or political movements. From the basis of what criteria can we qualify a fact or an event as a social movement? Understanding political and social transformations requires accounting for the genesis and the contextual structure of the key forces at play in a given space. This implies to come back upon the identification of the historical trajectories of places and people who have contributed to generate new configurations in social space or in the political field. Some struggles take the form of virulent protests or specific claims while others take place in a transformation of modes of doing and thinking

pertaining more to a global reorganization of social space. These struggles do or do not reach certain outcomes akin to the formulation of clearly defined claims. They can also appear as a manifest or latent transformation in a certain order of things. At last, to what extent do these transformations become durable? What are the social structures that favour these evolutions and inscribe them in an ensemble of processes of formalization, consecration, ritualisation and even institutionalization (for example when a social movement structures itself as a political party)?

The symbolic construction of social and political movements

The complexity and diversity of social and political movements in South Asia calls for the examination of their *symbolic construction*, that is of the practices, beliefs and rituals that culturally institute their existence. A social and/or political movement takes different forms: whether one deals with protests, in the restricted sense, or with the creation of networks of power at different scales and in different spaces, or even through the repositioning of particular agents (such as the position of women in Indian society, ascending administrative careers among lower castes and “untouchables”, etc.). In the case of actions endowed with contesting objectives, what one designates as social and political movements crystallize different forms of questioning of the social world. In South Asia, it seems particularly important to raise the question of their symbolic construction inasmuch as relational aspects of daily life remain structured in specific categories and schemes of perception often embedded in religious conceptions (especially gandhian conceptions in their diverse forms, but also ambedkarite Buddhist conceptions, social struggles related to Hindu nationalism, etc.). These schemes and categories do however coexist with other patterns and modalities of collective action specific to syndicalism, or even close to insurrectional forms of movements: naxalites, talibans or neo-talibans, private high caste militias, etc. It is therefore necessary to circumscribe the range of distinctive properties displayed by different forms of activism in South Asia and to analyse the circulation of modes of action and of the symbolic styles of mobilization generally inherited from the struggles against colonial domination. The latter might as well be the products of new scopes of action able, among other things, to display certain new forms of mediation due to the reinforcement or emergence of transnational modes of struggle.

The economy of activist practices

The study of the different phenomena that can be categorized as “social and political movements” requires paying attention to the *economy of activist practices*. This does not only imply a study of the social properties of the groups involved into these restructuration or of the agents participating to these different movements, but also, depending on the cases, it calls for examining the origin(s) and position(s) of the leading agents, that is to say of the various leaders who claim to carry out social salvation and often are self-consecrated as prophets in their spaces of influence. Whether one deals with a weakly structured social space or namely with a social field, such as the political one, the practices of participating agents and movements leaders need to be described and analyzed from the angle of a symbolic economy of activist practices. This implies the identification of the different species of resources (cultural and educational, political, economic, social, etc.) and interests mobilized in the diverse spaces or sub-spaces of practices of contestation in order to unveil the necessities and logics explaining a more or less strong investment for a precise cause or the unequal propensity to be able to know how to lead a movement. It is for example possible to talk of activists careers and even of an *activist capital* indicative of spaces of struggles where a protesting knowledge becomes a specific type of resource itself, the product of a prior acquisition of skills transposed in other spaces.

The propositions of contribution (300 words approximately) ought to be sent before the 30th November at the following adress: ateliers@ajei.org. Each presentation will last 20 minutes, and will be discussed by a specialist. The complete articles (20 000 signs) will have to be sent before the 15th January 2010. Please mention with your propositions your last name, first name, your study level and your institution(s) of affiliation.